

CAVE WALL ISSUE 15 REVISION INTERVIEWS

Since our art for issue 15 consists of images of early drafts of some of the issue's poems, we thought it would be interesting to ask our poets questions about their revision process. Each poet chose which questions he/she would like to answer. One question was submitted by Audrey Trull, age 6, *Cave Wall's* Official Poem Acceptor.

We encourage you to purchase a copy of issue 15 if you don't have one so that you can see the drafts that go along with some of these questions—and, of course, so that you can read the awesome poems by these, and more, contributors.

KASEY JUEDS

Kasey Jueds's first book of poems, Keeper, won the 2012 Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize from the University of Pittsburgh Press. She has three poems in Cave Wall #15.

1. Audrey's Question: Does revision mean "fixing" a poem?

What a deep question – thank you, Audrey. I've been thinking about this a lot since I first read it. And I think, ideally, revision isn't so much fixing a poem as it is helping the poem to be more itself, more what it wants to be. That might mean that the poem gets "better" as it gets revised, in some of the ways we tend to think of as "better" (for me, usually, tighter/less wordy, more musically/rhythmically attuned). And "better" might be part of helping the poem to become itself. But I think this becoming is apart from the "bettering," as well.

2. Do you hand-write or type your originals? At what point, if any, in the revision process do you type? Do you have special notebooks/pens/pencils/etc.? Is there a special place you like to sit for revision-work, a special drink you like to drink, etc.?

I love this question. Rituals are so important! I hand-write my originals in a notebook, and a big part of my revision process consists of copying a draft over and over and over into the notebook, adding and deleting and changing as I go. I don't type up my poems until a fairly late stage in the process since I have a weird magical-thinking attitude toward seeing them typed, which makes them seem more "done" and less open to revision. I love my notebooks and choose them carefully, and I LOVE my pens. They are non-expensive Lamy Safari plastic fountain pens and I get a ton of geeky joy from cleaning them and filling them with ink (plus I have a ridiculous amount of fountain pen ink at this point, more than I'll probably use in my lifetime). And I like to drink tea – always, but especially when revising, even when it's 90 outside. The tea ritual, like the fountain pen ritual, is super grounding for me.

3. Can there be such a thing as too much revision?

For a long time I would have said no, but now I think yes, definitely. I know I've killed poems by revising and revising – it just seems to drain the life out of them sometimes. I still revise but

not nearly as much as I used to, and I don't revise if I don't feel any excitement or joy about working on a poem; in those cases, I try to just let it go, and move on to the next thing.

4. Do you ever feel as if your inner self-critique voice gets too loud, drowning out what the poem wants to be? How do you quiet it?

Yes, yes, yes! I struggle with this so often, though it seems to move in waves – sometimes the voice is more insistent, sometimes easier to quiet. One thing that has helped is recognizing that the voice is not an enemy (though it sounds like it) – it only wants to protect me. Making poems and then sometimes publishing them – these are such deeply vulnerable acts. The voice demands to know why I'd expose myself this way, why I'd do something that feels so frightening. Recognizing that the voice is trying, in a roundabout way, to help: that seems to soothe it, at least sometimes. Other things that help: being kind to myself (this helps with pretty much everything, and it's amazing how hard it can be, still, to remember to do this and actually follow through!); having a cup of tea, leaving the work of revision for a while and doing something else, talking or writing to a poet friend, reading something I love, reminding myself that I'm not alone.

MATTHEW THORBURN

Matthew Thorburn is the author of seven collections of poems, including The Grace of Distance (LSU, 2019) and Dear Almost (LSU, 2016), winner of the 2017 Lascaux Prize in Collected Poetry. Four poems from the series he mentions below appear in Cave Wall #15, along with images of two early drafts.

1. Audrey's Question: Does revision mean "fixing" a poem?

Well, I'll tell you: the feeling I often bring to a poem when I'm working on revisions is a sense that something isn't "working." So yes, I'm often aiming to "fix" the poem. But I also hope that in trying to fix a poem what will actually happen is that I'll discover something new—some different direction the poem wants to go in, or a different turn of phrase that opens up a new line of thought, or a surprising new image. As Charles Simic once said, the poem is smarter than I am, so I try to follow it wherever it goes.

My poems in this issue of *Cave Wall* are part of a book-length sequence of poems I've been working on about an imaginary teenaged boy and his experiences in a time of war and its aftermath. This is what fiction writers do all the time, of course—dreaming up people and what they say and do. But my poems more often come out of my own direct experience and aren't so "made up." I have to tell you, this has been intensely freeing for me, and it's made revising a more interesting process. If something in one of these poems isn't working, or doesn't feel fixable, I feel very free to just get rid of it—or maybe write the opposite of what I was trying to say, and see what that does to the poem. So fixing can also be reinventing or reimagining for me.

2. Do you hand-write or type your originals? At what point, if any, in the revision process do you type? Do you have special notebooks/pens/pencils/etc.? Is there a special place you like to sit for revision-work, a special drink you like to drink, etc.?

“Disappear,” “Once,” and “The Stag” all grew out of lines I wrote down in a pocket notebook I’ve been using for the past two or three years to catch ideas and images and lines I think could find their way into this book-length sequence. Sometimes I’ve had a more specific idea in mind when notebooking—for instance, “The Stag” started with the very intentional thought that I wanted to write a poem in response to Gerhard Richter’s mesmerizing painting. I also have a distinct memory of walking quickly up the steps to the 231st Street subway station (the 1 train runs above ground in The Bronx) one morning so I could get this odd image of someone writing a message on the wall beside a piano down in my notebook before I forgot it, as well as the little litany of deaths in “Disappear.” These things came from who-knows-where into my tired head as I set off on my morning commute.

What I most often do is just write things down like this so I can come back to them later. I’ve learned to trust that they will find their way into a poem, but don’t need to be a poem in this first moment. But often when I would reread those pages weeks later, lines that I’d noted at different times would speak to or echo each other in interesting ways. At that point I’d type up a draft—and from there I’d carry a print-out around with me to re-read and mark up whenever I had time during the day. With this sequence, I tended to work on these poems in batches of four or five poems at a time, so I’d have my little bundle of pages folded in half that I’d keep in my work bag and pull out at lunchtime or on my ride home.

“A Little” is an unusual poem for me because I actually *spoke* my first draft into my iPhone’s voice memo app while walking home one night from that same subway station. There’s a tailor’s shop in the neighborhood where I used to live, and often I’d see the tailor sitting in his front window at his sewing machine, making alterations (a good visual metaphor for revision!). I had wanted to get him into a poem for a while, then something clicked and I started saying these lines about his work. I eventually transcribed those notes, but they stayed in my notebook for another while. It wasn’t until I started working on this book-length sequence that I remembered him and realized the tailor would be someone else living through this war I was imagining.

3. Do you have any revision tricks that help you, such as rewriting from a different POV, changing verb tense, trying the poem in a different form, etc.?

Oh yes, at different times I’ve tried all the things you mention, and they’re all good tricks. Anything to shake up a poem can be helpful when it feels broken but you’re not sure how to fix it. In terms of form, I sometimes find shifting a poem into different size stanzas or a pattern of stanzas—say, four-line stanzas, or alternating two- and three-line stanzas—can be helpful, especially if it forces me to cut an “extra” line or two to fit the pattern. Any kind of constraint like that to work against can put some helpful pressure on the poem. The reverse can help too, though: sometimes if a poem in stanzas doesn’t feel right, I try it as a prose poem. For some reason, seeing the poem as prose sentences can help me see the dead wood—the “extra” words I don’t really need and can cut.

4. Does reading aloud enter into your revision process? If so, is this something you do early on or later, when the poem is closer to complete?

Absolutely. I'm always interested in how a poem sounds and how the rhythm is working as I read it aloud. There's a kind of conversational rhythm I like in poems and find myself listening for. I also love internal rhymes and half-rhymes, alliteration, all the sound-effect fireworks writers can call on. It helps me to "hear" those if I revise aloud so I can actually hear them.

This book-length sequence is written with almost no punctuation (aside from a period at the end of each poem), which is something new for me, so I also read these poems aloud throughout my writing and revising to be sure they made sense to me. I want to be sure I can hear transitions from thought to thought or, again, that there is an effective rhythm in the poems, many of which are like interior monologues that can shift quickly in different directions.

TORI REYNOLDS

Tori Reynolds lives in Hillsborough, NC. Her poems have appeared most recently in Chautauqua Literary Review, The Greensboro Review, The North Carolina Literary Review, Pembroke Magazine, South Carolina Review, and Southwest Review. She has poems in anthologies published by Eno River Press and Jacar Press. She has a poem in Cave Wall #15.

1. Audrey's Question: Does revision mean "fixing" a poem?

I love this question, Audrey! I think of revision as a way to make a poem sing, to hit all the notes in a way that brings it into harmony with itself. However, when a poem has a problem, I do think of revision as a way to tune, tweak, and alter it here and there so it can reach closest to form, meaning, sounds, etc. that I am trying for. Mostly, that occurs by being able to see the poem anew—with new eyes. To literally re-envision it.

2. How many drafts do you tend to write? For how long do you typically revise?

It depends on the poem. Some have so many revisions that I've lost the poem and never found it again. (This is the answer to #12 as well). On average, I revise a poem 3-4 times.

3. Do you revise/edit as you write the poem, or wait until you complete a draft and then go back through each line?

Again, it depends on the poem. Some come out whole. They pop right out like a newborn and then need a little cleaning up. Others are constructed stanza by line by line by word. Those poems I do tend to revise and edit as I'm writing—trying on this word, that line break, etc. because it often leads me to the next line or word or stanza.

4. Do you hand-write or type your originals? At what point, if any, in the revision process do you type? Do you have special notebooks/pens/pencils/etc.? Is there a special place you like to sit for revision-work, a special drink you like to drink, etc.?

I like to write on my computer and revise that way too. I used to handwrite in a very particular sized journal that has a column on the left hand margin that's designated for "action notes" and that's where I tended to write most of my poems—in the margin. Something about the column size and the idea that it was just a little side thought seemed to inspire poems. Hmm...maybe I'll go back to this way of writing.

5. Do you have any revision tricks that help you, such as rewriting from a different POV, changing verb tense, trying the poem in a different form, etc.?

The simplest and most successful for me is to just put it in a drawer for a while so that I am not so close to it when I return to revise it. Then the problems and clunky parts really stand out to my eye and ear.

6. Does reading aloud enter into your revision process? If so, is this something you do early on or later, when the poem is closer to complete?

I always read the poem aloud, usually towards the end of the revision process.

7. Are there certain poets to whose work you turn during the revision process, whose poems put you in the right frame of mind to approach your own work in a new way?

No, but I really look forward to hearing what other poets have to say about this!

8. Do you find feedback from other poets helpful in your revision process?

Yes, I find it essential. I belong to a poetry group and count on their ability to show me what's in my poem better than I can see it myself. Sometimes they disagree completely about something in my poem, and sometimes I leave feeling like I have no idea how to revise, but it's still vital to my writing process to have that readership and their critique.

9. Can there be such a thing as too much revision?

Yes, I think so.

10. Do you ever feel as if your inner self-critique voice gets too loud, drowning out what the poem wants to be? How do you quiet it?

I am having a problem with this right now. My inner critic has joined forces with the outer critics who arrive in my writing process in hordes after I get a rejection from a journal I've submitted to. The more submissions, the more rejections, the stronger the inner critic that questions not just what I've written, but why I've written anything at all. I quiet it by returning to my poetry group

to get feedback because they often find my poems more worthy than I do, and by not sending things out for publication.

11. How do you tighten and reign in without losing the wild energies that sparked the poem in the first place?

A lot of times, a poem will come to me in a specific place. It's not often about that place, but if I return to that place in my mind, the originating spark for the poem will re-ignite and that will often help return me to the core of the poem.

12. How do you know when your poem is ready?

A poem is ready when my partner says he loves it. ☺ He's a painter, by the way, and he says his paintings are never truly finished. He just has to stop working on them so he can move onto others.

EMMA BOLDEN

Emma Bolden is the author of House Is An Enigma (forthcoming from Southeast Missouri State UP), medi(t)ations (Noctuary Press, 2016) and Maleficae (GenPop Books, 2013). The recipient of a 2017 Creative Writing Fellowship from the NEA. She has two poems in Cave Wall #15, along with images of two early drafts.

1. Audrey's Question: Does revision mean "fixing" a poem?

This is a terrific question and I think yes, it does. If a poem's a machine for conveying meaning, drafts often don't do their job as well as they need to. When one revises a poem, one makes it a better, stronger machine more well-equipped to do the work of conveying meaning, emotion, and revelation.

2. How many drafts do you tend to write? For how long do you typically revise?

I'm answering this one because I'm realizing that I don't exactly know the answer to this one. I'd estimate that each poem tends to go through at least ten or so drafts. Sometimes, a poem goes through many, many more—and sometimes, I revise a poem to death. I also feel like it's healthy to recognize earlier in a process if a poem as a whole is just not going to work; a lot of times, I'll salvage words or phrases from one unworkable poem and try to work them into another. My revision process can go from days to year. Sometimes I'll even give up on a piece then pick it up a few years later, see it through new eyes, and find the window through which I can look in and revise.

3. How is your revision-brain different from your first-draft brain?

I think that a lot of the work I've done—and progress I've made—as a writer involves separating revision-brain and draft-brain. It's been a life-long process for me. I tend to be a perfectionist, to try for smooth surfaces, to want to be so exact that I sometimes intimidate myself out of writing and speaking. I've learned that, for me at least, in order for the drafting process to be successful, it has to be anything but smooth. It has to be imperfect, imprecise. I have to allow myself to put everything on the page, even if I know it's terrible, because allowing myself to be terrible also allows me to push through my perfectionist desire for a smooth surface and into the troubled waters, which is where the real revelation of the poem lives. My first drafts often don't even look like poems; I might use a virgule every now and then, just a sign to my future revision-brain self, but otherwise, I don't draft with linebreaks. When the draft is finished and it's time for revision-brain to do its job, I feel like a sculptor with a chisel, carefully chipping away until the shape of a poem emerges and then zooming in on details—punctuation, images, sounds, spaces without image or punctuation or sound—and adjusting, carefully, repeatedly, until I find a way to let the language (and not-language—often, white space is every bit as important) convey what the poem wants to convey.

4. Do you hand-write or type your originals? At what point, if any, in the revision process do you type? Do you have special notebooks/pens/pencils/etc.? Is there a special place you like to sit for revision-work, a special drink you like to drink, etc.?

For me, it depends on the genre. I tend to type first drafts of prose, though I do sometimes write them out by hand. More often, I find myself thinking of additions/alterations to what I've typed up and writing them in a notebook. I tend to hand-write poetry or use a writing app on my phone; I rarely type first drafts of poems on a laptop. I move to typing pretty quickly, usually the second or third draft. I often doodle and draw (poorly) to occupy my mind and help me move past a sticking point in a piece, so I'm a big fan of those Moleskine notebooks with the thick, almost-bleed-proof paper. Right now, my favorite pen is an Extra Fine Pilot Precise V5 Roller Ball.

5. Emma, at the top of one of your drafts that appears in *Cave Wall*, you've written, "some lines that came to me in the shower" – What do tags like that do for you when you return to the draft to work on the poem again?

Oh, that's a great question! Mostly, they're like road signs. My drafts tend to be terribly scattered: I'll write a few lines on a notebook and then a few more in another notebook, on the whiteboard by my shower, on the whiteboard in my office, on a CVS receipt, on the back of my hand – you get the picture. I use tags like "in the shower" or "in the car at the drug store" or "idk on my phone on the rest stop in Mississippi I think" as a way to lead myself back through my process and find which lines are meant to go together – and, hopefully, why. Sometimes, knowing the geography of the moment I wrote the line helps me to remember the intent behind the line.

CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

Christopher Buckley's most recent books are *Cloud Memoir: Selected Longer Poems* (*Stephen F. Austin State Univ. Press, forthcoming*), *Chaos Theory* (*Plume Editions, 2018*), *Star Journal:*

Selected Poems (*Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 2016*), Spanish Notebook (*Shabda Press, 2017*), and The Far Republics (*Cloudbank Books, 2017*). He is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in Poetry, two NEA grants, a Fulbright Award in Creative Writing, and four Pushcart Prizes. He has a poem in Cave Wall #15.

1. Audrey's Question: Does revision mean "fixing" a poem?

YES. Of course. Not that the initial draft of a poem is "broken," but rather it is incomplete in many possible ways. Revising encompasses adds, cuts, tightening, changes, shifts, and discovers alternate or hidden themes, titles, endings. In over 40 years I have met no geniuses who have the poem right/as it should best be on an initial draft.

2. How many drafts do you tend to write? For how long do you typically revise?

25, 30, 50, 65 . . . usually more than fewer, over many months: 5, 6, 8?

3. Do you revise/edit as you write the poem, or wait until you complete a draft and then go back through each line?

I do very little revising as I write the rough draft(s). Usually I go back through the poem again and again over time: see Q. 2. above. I will often revise a poem after it is published before it goes in a book.

4. How is your revision-brain different from your first-draft brain?

First/rough drafts are essentially un-edited. The idea is to get down whatever lines, voice, rhythm, images, ideas that are presenting themselves as quickly and fluidly as possible. I question next to nothing as I know I will switch hats after the rough draft process and put on the Editor's hat/"revision-brain" and go back through time and again, cutting and changing.

5. Do you hand-write or type your originals? At what point, if any, in the revision process do you type? Do you have special notebooks/pens/pencils/etc.? Is there a special place you like to sit for revision-work, a special drink you like to drink, etc.?

I hand write my rough drafts on yellow legal pads with a fountain pen. I have been using fountain pens since grammar school. When I was pretty poor in my 20's and 30's I used a Shaeffer bought at the drug store for \$4.95, cartridge fill. Later I became a collector/fanatic [regarding] fountain pens; it is a twelve-step program to stop buying and collecting them on E Bay, Fountain Pen Network etc. I follow the nibs . . . good wet Medium to Broad point: Mont Blanc, Pelikan, Parkers . . . I like a large pen and at one time had 5 Mont Blanc 149/Diplomats. A fountain pen gets across the pad faster than ball points or pencil and pretty much keeps up with the thought process. Of late I have been selling some off; have more than I can reasonably use. My good friend Philip Levine had an amazing collection of fountain pens, and often gave pens away to friends. For his birthday, which he loved to celebrate each January, I knew a fountain

pen was a present that always worked. My friend the poet John Skoyles is also a collector and great fan of fountain pens.

Often now, I find sitting at our pine table in the patio late afternoon and evening with a glass of Pinot, modestly sipped, loosens or better connects the synapses when writing rough drafts, but that is not exclusive. Sometimes a few lines or passage jotted quickly in a small notebook will be the catalyst.

6. Do you have any revision tricks that help you, such as rewriting from a different POV, changing verb tense, trying the poem in a different form, etc.?

Sure, all of the above, whatever seems to work, nothing programmatic. =In my youth, I was a tennis pro, teaching mostly. But when playing tournaments, the last thing I thought about during a match was the correct process for hitting a half volley or backhand passing shot, an American Twist serve. After years of practice, I counted on muscle memory and concerned myself with strategy. The same goes for finding the form for poems; at this point I count on poetic muscle memory to put me on the right track, or to suggest a different form.

7. Does reading aloud enter into your revision process? If so, is this something you do early on or later, when the poem is closer to complete?

No, I do not read aloud to myself. Then again, I do do that, in my head, hearing the voice, the rhythm, essential in revising.

8. What other sources inspire your revision-work (research, certain dictionaries, other poets/poems, etc.)?

Sometimes, research plays a part, but usually not intentionally. I do not say, "Let's see what I can find out about this subject that might make for a poem." But often enough, especially with my most recent book, *Chaos Theory*, reading on a subject that relates to an overall theme or idea I'm working on provides material. *Chaos Theory*, e.g., takes up the subjects of cosmology, astrophysics, astronomy, theoretical physics and the like, but balances them off against personal experience and speculation, faith and doubt. Since the early 80's, I've been interested in cosmology, astrophysics, theoretical physics et al. I have watched countless episodes of NOVA on PBS and read articles and books written to explain the concepts and discoveries to non-professionals like myself with at best a 9th grade education in science. Atomic theory goes back to the Pre-Socratics, and to communicate the ideas, the writers have to simplify the language, often rendering it in metaphors. This has all contributed to my concerns as a poet, a pitting of metaphysics against a logical doubt and the facts of science. All that has to be balanced with everyday experience that is where the irony usually enters, for me at least. I try not to sound like a science student repeating his class notes, to keep the phrasing balanced and come up with some meaning, some ideas at least—something that will keep me interested and striving. Research as lyric underpinning.

The main thing is to have a poet or two who will read and edit/respond to early drafts completely candidly. Gary Young has been doing this for me for 40 years and also my dear departed friend

Jon Veinberg, bless his soul. Over the years when I was especially stuck with a difficult poem I would send it to Phil Levine who I knew would be rigorous, and helpful, who would pull no punches. I think over 40 years I maybe sent Phil 5 poems for help. Too many people asked too much of him and he was always too generous; I tried not to add too much to the burden. One poem, "Poverty" had gone through Gary and Jon and I had written 30 or more drafts, and still it was not right. I sent it to Phil and he agreed with cutting several more lines I was suspicious of, and he said he thought the ending needed work, and he offered a rewrite of it. I revised the poem with the cuts, additional tweaks, and the changed ending and sent it back to him. Phil responded that this was more like it, only, the ending needed work! And he revised the ending yet again which I stuck with and which made the poem. He revised himself as well as me. That poem with his help won the James Dickey Prize from *Five Points* magazine. I knew enough to accept a gift when given it. Of late, Peter Everwine has been very helpful in editing and responding to poems for me. Usually it is a matter of trimming, cutting down.

9. How does research play a role in revision that's different from its role in inspiration?

Only in so far as fact checking [regarding] theme, and so I do not sound either ignorant or pompous or both.

10. Are there certain poets to whose work you turn during the revision process, whose poems put you in the right frame of mind to approach your own work in a new way?

Well, I try to introduce folks I have not read extensively into my reading. Right now I have 3 books of Jean Follain I have started, someone very unlike me in voice and form, but it might help reign in excesses in my work. Over the years I have read many of the same poets who I hope keep me on the right track, keep me from becoming stale: Phil, Everwine, Charles Wright, Wislawa Szymborska, Mary Oliver, Gerald Stern, Milosz, and especially Neruda, Vallejo and all the Spanish language poets.

11. Can there be such a thing as too much revision?

Sure. You can drain the blood/voice out of a poem by "cleaning it up" too much. Back in the day when I worked only on a typewriter, I kept a box by my desk and I clipped together, in order, all of my drafts of each poem. Sometimes I would get to the 40th draft and find it flat, though clean. I'd then pull out the packet of drafts for that poem from the box and look at the first version or two and try to hear again the voice and rhythm that got it going, and that usually put me back on track; the poem ended up somewhere between the 1st draft and the heavily edited one.

12. Do you ever feel as if your inner self-critique voice gets too loud, drowning out what the poem wants to be?

Repeating 11 here essentially. Keep early drafts and go back to them. These days I find it good to keep both the very rough drafts written by hand and the early versions as Word docs on the computer, so I can check back and hear the voice.

13. How do you tighten and reign in without losing the wild energies that sparked the poem in the first place?

Much as I have described: by checking back with early versions.

14. How do you know when your poem is ready?

You rely on your poet pals, your editors. But even then, when Gary or Jon would say it was done, save the changes they suggested I make, I would do that, make the edits, and then see further edits as I went through. After all that response from trusted poets and months at it, it would seem done. But then it helps also to send the poems out and see what responses you receive from editors. If no one finds it worthy, then you likely have more work in front of you. But you also have to take rejections with a pillar of salt. That “Poverty” poem that Phil helped me with and which won the James Dickey prize for example: it was rejected several places for over a year and with one editor offering to publish it if I cut all of the poem but the first 10 lines. But I believed in Phil and in the poem and kept the faith with it and it won out. You never know for sure.

MOLLY SPENCER

Molly Spencer’s poetry has appeared in FIELD, Gettysburg Review, New England Review, Ploughshares, and elsewhere. Her critical writing has appeared at Colorado Review, Kenyon Review Online, The Rumpus, and Tupelo Quarterly. Molly holds an MFA from the Rainier Writing Workshop and is Poetry Editor at The Rumpus. She teaches writing at the University of Michigan’s Ford School of Public Policy. She has three poems in Cave Wall #15, along with images of two early drafts.

1. Audrey’s Question: Does revision mean “fixing” a poem?

No, it means listening for what the poem wants to be.

2. How many drafts do you tend to write? For how long do you typically revise?

It depends on the poem. Most of my poems go through at least 15-20 revisions, but many I’ve revised over the course of years. Often, these poems work their way into being through draft after abandoned draft. So I might write a draft, then revise it for several weeks or months, then abandon it. Then repeat this process. Then repeat it again. Each cycle is an attempt at the poem I’m trying to write (although I’m not usually aware of this at the time—I’m only aware that I’ve taken each version as far as it can go, and I’m not satisfied with it). Then, once I’ve finally written and revised a poem that I finally feel satisfied with, I can look back and see that all the abandoned drafts led up to it.

3. Do you revise/edit as you write the poem, or wait until you complete a draft and then go back through each line?

I used to write a draft and then go back, but for the poems in my second manuscript, I let revision into the drafting process, crossing out words as better words occurred to me, leaving blanks, trying a line a few different ways. I know people usually say that drafting and revision require two different mindsets, but I'm not sure that's always true. Or maybe this way of working is less revision during the drafting process and more trying out options as I draft?

4. How is your revision-brain different from your first-draft brain?

My revision brain is really more my revision gut: something tells me the poem's not yet fully itself, or that an image isn't working, or a line / stanza / progression / phrase is not quite right. This is not to say I don't use my brain at all, but first comes intuition.

5. Do you hand-write or type your originals? At what point, if any, in the revision process do you type? Do you have special notebooks/pens/pencils/etc.? Is there a special place you like to sit for revision-work, a special drink you like to drink, etc.?

I almost always draft by hand (I can think of one or two exceptions), then type up the draft and print it, sometimes revising as I type. I use Decomposition notebooks and Pentel EnerGel pens (0.7 thickness) for drafting, and Schneider Extra Hybrid pen (.3 thickness) in green to note revisions on printed versions of a poem. I work best at home, at my desk, which was my grandfather's (a newspaper man), in the light of an oil lamp, with tea.

6. Do you have any revision tricks that help you, such as rewriting from a different POV, changing verb tense, trying the poem in a different form, etc.?

I occasionally resort to tricks—the most fruitful for me is to reverse the poem's order—but mostly my revision process is simply to listen deeply to what the poem is trying to be. Often I hear the voice of my first teacher of poetry as I listen: "Be brave and cut much."

7. Does reading aloud enter into your revision process? If so, is this something you do early on or later, when the poem is closer to complete?

Absolutely. Reading aloud gets the draft into my body, which is where intuition resides. I'll read a draft aloud when I feel I've taken the poem as far as I can...at least for that day, so sometimes that's early in the process and sometimes it's later in the process.

8. What other sources inspire your revision-work (research, certain dictionaries, other poets/poems, etc.)?

My etymology dictionary is a crucial revision tool, as is my thesaurus (I use *Barnhart's Concise* and sometimes *etymonline.com*, and J. I. Rodale's *The Synonym Finder*, respectively). I took a class on translation a few years ago, and since then I often think of revision as translation: that is, translating a draft of the poem into its next version. To translate, it's important to have just the

right words, with just the right connotations. So often, knowing the etymology of a word in a draft has opened up an entirely new direction for the poem.

9. How does research play a role in revision that's different from its role in inspiration?

Research in the inspiration phase might lead to an idea for a poem, or might influence facts, objects, or words to include in a draft. Builders and carpenters talk about “truing” something—bringing a doorframe, for example, into just the right alignment or position. Research during the revision process is about truing the poem to itself.

10. Can there be such a thing as too much revision?

Yes.

11. Do you ever feel as if your inner self-critique voice gets too loud, drowning out what the poem wants to be? How do you quiet it?

Yes, and when this happens, I set the poem aside for a while.

12. How do you tighten and reign in without losing the wild energies that sparked the poem in the first place?

I listen. I listen, and listen, and listen.

13. How do you know when your poem is ready?

I don't always, but generally when my intuition stops nudging me about a poem. I'll sometimes make slight changes (edits, really, rather than revisions) to a “final” version of a poem for... *years* afterward.

14. Molly, I noticed your drafts of one of your poems in this issue got slimmer, then filled back out. Can you talk about cutting/tightening too much and how you knew when you'd lost too much?

I don't think I know when I've lost too much; I only know when the poem stops doing its work in me. When my intuition is telling me the poem's not done, I keep working on it, and sometimes this means the next version of the poem expands.

BILLY REYNOLDS

Billy Reynolds was born and raised in Huntsville, Alabama (“The Rocket City”). His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in The Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review, Poet Lore, Southern Poetry Review, and Tar River Poetry, among others. He lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He has four poems in Cave Wall #15, along with an image of an early draft.

1. Audrey’s Question: Does revision mean “fixing” a poem?

Yep, sometimes it does! I realize, uh oh, this is definitely unfinished, and I try to see a way through and finish it.

2. How many drafts do you tend to write? For how long do you typically revise?

It depends. I’ve written a few poems in one sitting, but that’s a 1/1000 chance. Most of the time I’m working off and on for weeks and months and worried I’m wasting my time.

3. Can there be such a thing as too much revision?

I’ve killed some poems during revision and then had to return to previous drafts to find what I had lost.

4. Do you ever feel as if your inner self-critique voice gets too loud, drowning out what the poem wants to be? How do you quiet it?

Sometimes I have to take that voice on a long walk in the woods and leave it there. It always comes back, so I do my best to distract it, which only works for so long.

5. How do you tighten and reign in without losing the wild energies that sparked the poem in the first place?

I guess I start thinking about some reader out there getting really bored or frustrated, and that usually helps.

6. How do you know when your poem is ready?

The truth is I never really know, and that’s okay.

PETER KLINE

Peter Kline teaches writing at the University of San Francisco and Stanford University. His first collection of poems, Deviants, was published by Stephen F. Austin State University Press in 2013. One of his mirrorform poems is in Cave Wall #15, along with an image of an early draft.

1. Does reading aloud enter into your revision process? If so, is this something you do early on or later, when the poem is closer to complete?

I read my work aloud at all phases of the writing and revision process. For me, a line won’t work and a poem can’t be finished until they sound just right. I don’t have any overarching theory about this—it is a purely intuitive process for me, different for each poem. Therefore, much of

my writing and revision involves obsessively chanting lines over and over until the sound leads me into the next line or the right revision solution. This requires a particular physical writing environment, of course—it's difficult to work this way in a quiet café! Another challenge with this method is that sound can be seductive, leading me to miss other kinds of problems that are disguised by the lushness of a line's music. So a critical part of revision for me is gaining perspective on what I've said, trying to find a more objective understanding of the function of all the poem's elements even as I am still attentive to the successful elements that led me to write the line in the first place.

2. Do you ever feel as if your inner self-critique voice gets too loud, drowning out what the poem wants to be? How do you quiet it?

This has been a particular problem for me lately. I have been finding it harder to enter into a poem with the sense of open-minded abandon that allows me to fumble through clichés and mistakes and false starts and placeholders on the way to the true poem, in part because my aesthetic is much more sharply formed than it was when I was just beginning as a poet. I have a much firmer sense now of mistakes that I don't want to make, of received language and poeticisms that I want to avoid. The fact that I spent five years writing nothing but mirrorforms has also played into this—the rigors of that form and its absolute compression made it much harder to blindly feel my way into the material. I learned to quickly exclude and abandon material that the form couldn't accommodate, and, conversely, to quickly identify language in which I could sense mirrorform potential. But now, as I've been transitioning away from writing mirrorforms, I've found it difficult to abandon that strict mindset.

When my students ask me this question, I point them to Lynda Barry's wonderful graphic essay, "Two Questions," in which she tells the story of how she lost her own innocently joyful experience of artmaking, and of the way she found her way back into that joy. There is a lot of wisdom in that piece. But, personally, I still struggle.

3. How is revising poems in this form you've invented different from revising your other poems?

The mirrorform is one of the most challenging forms I've ever worked in. As it's only eight lines in length, and as those lines are in trimeter, there is very little space. Storytelling is nearly impossible, as is the comprehensive treatment of an idea. The rigorous rhyme scheme creates further difficulty, though I ultimately find rhyme to be a generative rather than restrictive element in my writing—ideally, the right rhyme will lead me to an idea or an image that I never would have thought of on my own but that I discover to be exactly the right solution. The recurrence of the first line at the end of the poem is a final major difficulty in the form. How can I use the repeating line in such a way that it means something different when it returns? How can I make it surprising, even when the reader knows it's coming? Even if all of the rest of the mirrorform is working, if the final line feels flatly repetitive, the whole poem will fail.

The overall effect of these challenges is to make the writing process excruciatingly slow. All of the elements of the poem must completely cooperate for the poem to work, and I can't move on to the next line until I've gotten the previous line exactly right. This means that the revision

process occurs simultaneously with the writing process—I sometimes write dozens of drafts of the first two or three lines of a poem just so I can find just the right way for the poem to move forward. If I realize later that a line I thought was successful is actually problematic, changing it will likely prove to be problematic as well as its relationship to the surrounding material is altered. Thus, while on occasion I've successfully made substantial changes to full rough drafts of mirrorforms that have allowed me to salvage them, more often I've had to scrap them entirely, though not without a lot of fruitless scuffling first!

However, there is one major benefit of working in such a rigorous form—when it is fully successful, that success is more readily apparent to me. As the form and content must be in perfect harmony for such a concentrated poem to have success, when it's just right, I *know* it. This is quite a different experience from writing in an organic free verse form that leaves itself open to uncertainty because of my potentially idiosyncratic sense of how the form is functioning, and because of the limitless formal possibility. For example, when I write a mirrorform, I don't tend to second-guess my line breaks. The difference in this respect between writing mirrorforms and more traditional fixed forms, like the sonnet, is that I've had to discover for myself the proclivities and tendencies of the form that help establish that rightness—I don't have the benefit of a long tradition to draw from. But this, as you might imagine, is also a large part of what I've found so exciting about it.

CARRIE GREEN

Carrie Green earned her MFA at McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana, and has received grants from the Kentucky Foundation for Women, the Kentucky Arts Council, and the Louisiana Division of the Arts. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *DIAGRAM*, *Flyway*, *Poetry Northwest*, *River Styx*, *Terrain.org*, and elsewhere. She has two poems in *Cave Wall #15*.

1. Audrey's Question: Does revision mean "fixing" a poem?

Good question! I think maybe it means trying to fix a poem. But I'm not sure "fix" is the best word because it implies that there is one correct answer for the poem. The classic definition is that revision means to re-see. I think it means trying to let the poem say what it wants to say. Or, as Oprah might say, to let it be its best self.

2. How many drafts do you tend to write? For how long do you typically revise?

Revision is such a fluid process for me that it's hard to answer this question. Also, no poem is the same. A very, very few take only a few drafts, but I have some poems that I've tinkered with years later—10 or even 20 years. Who was it that said a poem is never really finished?

3. Do you revise/edit as you write the poem, or wait until you complete a draft and then go back through each line?

I wish I was more the wait-until-I-complete-a-draft type of writer because I feel like that would be more productive, but I'm more a line-by-line person.

4. How is your revision-brain different from your first-draft brain?

Yes, though it's hard to articulate. I try not to judge myself as much when writing my first drafts—I'm often unsuccessful with this effort, though. For revision, it's more about moving in and out of states of analysis and creation. I enjoy the challenge of revision when I think I know what the poem needs. It's the not knowing that makes it difficult.

5. Do you hand-write or type your originals? At what point, if any, in the revision process do you type? Do you have special notebooks/pens/pencils/etc.? Is there a special place you like to sit for revision-work, a special drink you like to drink, etc.?

I hand-write originals and start to type once a draft begins to shape up. Often, I end up hand-writing the same line/stanza over and over as I go. I'm not sure why—perhaps it makes me feel like I'm moving forward, even if I'm not?

I usually revise in the same place where I write, in my home office. The right pen (a Bic Atlantis) and drink (tea) are equally important for revision and drafting.

6. Does reading aloud enter into your revision process? If so, is this something you do early on or later, when the poem is closer to complete?

Reading aloud is an important part of both revision and drafting.

7. What other sources inspire your revision-work (research, certain dictionaries, other poets/poems, etc.)?

As you can tell from the poems in this issue, my poems often rely on research for both inspiration and revision. I used to worry about this, but then I heard Natasha Trethewey speak about her own writing process. She said that if she felt like a poem wasn't done, it usually meant she needed to do more research. If I'm remembering correctly, she often went back to the dictionary. The dictionary is an important part of my writing/revision process as well, and I often need to return to my original sources (like *Illustrations of the Nests and Eggs of Birds of Ohio*) or find new sources. Fact-checking my work is also part of the revision process.

8. How does research play a role in revision that's different from its role in inspiration?

When I first read about the Jones family and *Illustrations*, I had that tingly, excited feeling that Emily Dickinson might describe as feeling like the top of her head had been taken off. I wanted to learn more about this family, to take in the research about them and about birds so that I could better understand their lives and work—and, by extension, my own life and work.

For me, the role of research in the revision process is usually more analytical. I may be trying to find out something specific, for example, or checking for accuracy.

9. Do you find feedback from other poets helpful in your revision process?

Absolutely! I don't have a writing group, but I do have a couple of people that I trade work with. I sometimes wish I had more, though I also think having too many people critique your work can make it more difficult to sift through. Feedback is especially important when I'm not sure what the poem needs. I'm also very grateful to my partner for always being my first reader. We met in an MFA program, and though he now writes songs and academic articles instead of poetry, I'd be lost without being able to use him as a sounding board. He's also a writing center director, so he's pretty much an expert on giving feedback.

10. Can there be such a thing as too much revision?

I do think that sometimes you just have to let a poem be. I usually know it's time to stop when I find myself changing something and then changing it back—only to come back and tinker again years later.

11. Do you ever feel as if your inner self-critique voice gets too loud, drowning out what the poem wants to be? How do you quiet it?

I definitely struggle with this, but I'm afraid I don't have any solutions.

12. How do you know when your poem is ready?

See question 10.

ELIZABETH BREESE

Elizabeth Breese's chapbook, The Lonely-wilds (Kent State University Press, 2008), was selected by Maggie Anderson and published by The Wick Poetry Center/Kent State University Press. She has 2 poems in Cave Wall #15.

1. Audrey's Question: Does revision mean "fixing" a poem?

Audrey, I thought about your question a lot last night. What a good one! Yes, revision is certainly a kind of fixing, but it's a fixing without instructions or directions. When we're building a piece of furniture and it won't stand up without wobbling, we can usually go back to the instructions or a diagram and see what step we skipped, or what piece we're missing. With a wobbly poem, it isn't always so clear what step (or two or three!) we skipped, what piece we're missing, or sometimes, what piece needs to be removed for the poem to stand the way we want it. It can take quite a while to figure all of that out.

2. How is your revision-brain different from your first-draft brain?

I tend to revise and edit as I write. There isn't usually what I'd call a first draft. By the time the poem has taken shape on the page, it's already been seriously revised. It will need line edits, but the movement of the poem is pretty well in place. I do definitely have first drafts of phrases and sentences. If they get edited down or out, it's because they include an unforgivable guilty pleasure—unearned silliness, a gilded lily, gratuitous swearing. Revision-brain is a little less amused.

3. Does reading aloud enter into your revision process? If so, is this something you do early on or later, when the poem is closer to complete?

I always find it illuminating to take my poem out of my house and read it around town. In a park. In a parking lot. In a casual lunch place. I print it out and put it in my pocket for a few days and just take it out when I have a few minutes. I do read it aloud, not loudly, in these places and see if it feels as lively or magical as it did at home. Sometimes I realize a portion of the poem is clunky and needs finessing. Sometimes I find myself wanting to say one word in place of another. Occasionally I'll think I hit the nail on the head.

JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS

John Sibley Williams is the author of the forthcoming As One Fire Consumes Another (2018 Orison Poetry Prize) and Skin Memory (2018 Backwaters Prize), and serves as editor of The Inflectionist Review. He has two poems in Cave Wall #15.

1. Audrey's Question: Does revision mean "fixing" a poem?

Due to the subjective nature of poetry, how each reader will take something different from a piece, a writer cannot really "fix" a poem apart from ensuring consistency of punctuation, tense, and other objective grammatical elements. The bulk of the revision process is more a matter of tightening, strengthening, and layering (or stripping extraneous layers from).

2. Do you revise/edit as you write the poem, or wait until you complete a draft and then go back through each line?

Revision is a natural part of my composition process. Though each poem does go through a full revision after that first draft, mainly for the purpose of tightening and strengthening language, I do tend to revise lines as I go. As one image leads to the next, I find it difficult to remain inspired and keep a poem moving fluidly when there are weak lines in obvious need of polishing.

3. Does reading aloud enter into your revision process? If so, is this something you do early on or later, when the poem is closer to complete?

Reading aloud is absolutely essential to me at every step of the drafting and revision processes. If even a single phrase strikes my ear awkwardly, I tend to tweak it for musicality and fluidity. My

initial drafting process tends to involve reading a line aloud over and over until the next line comes to me. Often it's the sound of that first line that births the next. And I repeat this process with every line in every poem during every phase of writing.

4. How does research play a role in revision that's different from its role in inspiration?

I don't research during the initial draft, as it tends to distract from weaving together the larger themes and keeping that inspirational flame lit. However, if a poem includes details about place, culture, politics, or history, research becomes an essential tool during the revision process. A poet should never place a redwood in Iowa or a cardinal in Oregon, the Wailing Wall in Egypt or Appomattox in Georgia. Inaccurate details are fine during that first draft, especially if the poet is writing about an unfamiliar place, but further revisions require a strict editorial eye to ensure authenticity of the created experience.

5. Do you find feedback from other poets helpful in your revision process?

Absolutely. All poets should have a trusted group of peers who are eager to guide the revision process. Sometimes a poet will say too much or hold back too much. Sometimes a poem is overly personal in a way that shuts out readers, as the images don't speak to a larger human concern. Sometimes language can get muddled. Sometimes we might say more than show. Having critical eyes on poems I'm unsure of can be hugely beneficial. That said, it's important to remain true to one's vision and voice and not take feedback as gospel. In the end, my decisions must be my own.

CHELSEA WAGENAAR

Chelsea Wagenaar is the 2018 winner of the Michael Waters Prize and her second collection of poems, The Spinning Place, is forthcoming in fall 2019. Her first book, Mercy Spurs the Bone (Anhinga Press, 2015), won the 2013 Levine Prize. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of North Texas and currently teaches at Valparaiso University. She has two poems in Cave Wall #15 and an image of an early draft.

1. Do you have any revision tricks that help you, such as rewriting from a different POV, changing verb tense, trying the poem in a different form, etc.?

I draft in a notebook by hand and move the poem to a word processor when it feels close to being done. But when I revise it, or if I feel like moving it to a screen turned into an imaginative roadblock, I'll usually print a copy of it and go back to work on it by hand. Writing by hand lowers the stakes again, which helps me see the piece as completely malleable once more.

2. Chelsea, one of your early drafts of "Fontanel" contains a note you wrote to yourself indicating that you should rewrite the poem as a sonnet. Could you talk about form, how the poem finds its form. Is experimenting with form a typical part of your revision process?

I could talk about form for days, but I'm not sure it would make any sense! Form is, to me, one of the most mysterious, beautiful, and elusive characteristics of poetry. More and more I find myself thinking about the importance of "form" in our lives, and I have more questions than answers. I remember reading in one of Hass's essays—perhaps "Images"?—his description of form as the shape of a poem's meaning (not putting that in quotes because I may not have it exactly right).^{*} That's not a clinical definition at all, but it gives me a short starting place to return to when I begin to confuse myself. One way I think of form in my own work is as communicating something beyond language, and in that way, supporting and supplementing the language of the poem. The sonnet that appears in this *Cave Wall*, "Fontanel," became a sonnet only in later drafts. At first that poem was a sludge of ideas and images, and I think something tipped me off—maybe two words that inadvertently rhymed—to experiment with it as a sonnet. Moving the language of the poem to the form of a sonnet wasn't simply like pouring the contents of my coffee pot into my mug. It's more like if, when the coffee met the mug, the mug changed its flavor and color and also made it impossible to spill. When I found a way to contain that poem, I saw it more clearly and could imagine my way to the end of it. In the poem, the speaker's tiny daughter tumbles down the stairs, which becomes a way of reliving her birth again, the way that first rupture between their two selves repeats itself throughout their lives. In a way it's about chaos and disorder, so containing that in the form of a sonnet gives relief to that anxiety. And of course, the cause of the speaker's anxiety is love for her daughter which becomes, like all love, helpless at a certain point. And we all know that no matter what the language of a sonnet says, the form tells us it's about love.

[*Editor's Note: Hass writes about form in the essays "Images" and "One Body: Some Notes on Form." The latter includes this quote: "I am thinking of the form of a poem, the shape of its understanding. The presence of that shaping constitutes the presence of poetry."]

LOLA HASKINS

Lola Haskins's newest collection, Asylum, is due from University of Pittsburgh Press in Spring 2019. She is currently serving as Honorary Chancellor of the Florida State Poets Association. Other honors include the Iowa Poetry Prize, two Florida Book Awards, two NEAs, and the Emily Dickinson prize from Poetry Society of America. She has two poems in Cave Wall #15.

1. How many drafts do you tend to write? For how long do you typically revise?

I don't have a tendency, really. Some poems go through dozens of drafts, others only 4 or 5.

2. Do you revise/edit as you write the poem, or wait until you complete a draft and then go back through each line?

Mostly I wait, for the same reason experienced fiction writers tend not to revise their first few chapters (so I've heard) for 2 reasons: 1) a revision mindset slows the wilding down which in

turn makes inspiration harder, and 2) people who've been writing a long time know how often those first chapters end up cut because the book was going somewhere they hadn't thought of when they started. I think it's the same for poems. In other words, you flow until you can't, and THEN you look back.

3. Do you hand-write or type your originals?

After the age of about 5, when I used to illustrate my poems, I've been writing on some kind of keyboard. I think of it like jazz piano—it's improv. Also, if I hand-write, I tend to be thinking “this had better be good” whereas if I'm typing, it looks impersonal and I can just throw it away if I don't like it. In other words, writing with a pen or pencil makes me too conscious of what I'm doing. The result's a lot better if I can forget that.

4. Does reading aloud enter into your revision process? If so, is this something you do early on or later, when the poem is closer to complete?

I read aloud all along because to me poetry and music are the same thing and if I can't sing it, forget it. Besides, when I read it aloud, I hear the awkward bits better than I do just looking at it.

5. How does research play a role in revision that's different from its role in inspiration?

At one point I was writing pretty much all monologues and pretty much all of those were set in the past. So it would turn out I needed to know what they'd have planted in their garden in Civil War Florida, or what fifteenth century sailors wore on their feet. In other words, at that point it's mostly filling in. Every single thing I put in one of those had to be real, no bluffing, or I couldn't have turned into my voices.

6. Do you find feedback from other poets helpful in your revision process?

Four of us have been getting together every other week for 5 months of the year for 35 years but it's about to vanish because one of us is very ill and another isn't writing much anymore. That group has been wonderful because we sound absolutely nothing like each other but we're each able to get into the other's mindset—I guess what I'm saying is that the others are really sharp. And for awhile another poet and I were sending things back and forth. And yes, under those circumstances I've found outside advice really helpful. I didn't get English degrees though, so that's not been my routine and truth be told, I've always been a bit of a hermit that way.

7. Can there be such a thing as too much revision?

One of my poems ends like this: “Consider the graceless ones/ the painter who adds one more brush stroke/ the poet of least resistance, who writes past the end of his poem”. So, yes, I think there is.

8. Do you ever feel as if your inner self-critique voice gets too loud, drowning out what the poem wants to be? How do you quiet it?

You say, back off, mother. And mean it.

9. How do you know when your poem is ready?

Two ways—when it stops changing, and when no one but you could have written it

CELISA STEELE

Celisa Steele's poetry chapbook, How Language Is Lost, was published in 2011 by Emrys. She lives in Carrboro, NC, where she served as the town's poet laureate from 2013 to 2016. She has a poem in Cave Wall #15.

1. Audrey's Question: Does revision mean "fixing" a poem?

For me, no. "Fixing" suggests a poem is purely mechanical—that it can be made right by taking it apart and putting it back together as intended, as expected. But my favorite poems by other poets rarely work as expected, and my revision is least successful when I treat the poem like a broken watch.

I do better when I keep an eye on the poem's purpose (e.g., telling the time) and the existential question driving the poem (e.g., what *is* time?). If I only fiddle with line breaks and strike adverbs (mechanical edits), my revision doesn't improve the poem (much).

That doesn't mean to say the mechanics aren't important. If I only think about the big questions, ideas can get muddled in careless language. So the best revision (for me) involves looking at the mechanical minutiae—but after exploring the poem's overarching, usually more abstract obsessions.

2. Do you hand-write or type your originals? At what point, if any, in the revision process do you type? Do you have special notebooks/pens/pencils/etc.? Is there a special place you like to sit for revision-work, a special drink you like to drink, etc.?

I hand-write at first, in a not-noteworthy, standard-issue, college-ruled spiral notebook. I may hand-write 10 or more versions of the poem. I'm superstitious about typing my poems. If I type a poem too soon, it can calcify and lose its potential to shape-shift, to become something else or something more.

What usually prompts me to take a poem from notebook to laptop is sharing it with someone else, like Iris Tillman, friend and fellow poet, whom I've been meeting and trading poems with roughly twice a month for the past decade.

3. Do you find feedback from other poets helpful in your revision process?

In sociology, studies have shown that internalization (of, for example, a norm or expectation) can be either integrated—someone does something because she believes in it—or introjected—someone does something because she thinks she should, but she doesn't truly believe in it.

I've finally figured out what surely sounds obvious—all feedback is not equal. I've worked to determine whom I can trust to ask for feedback, and I use those people when I can. When I'm in an open-feedback situation (such as a critique workshop), I've learned to (try to) ignore most of what I hear—if there 10 poets in the workshop, it's usually the comments of two or three that can help me improve the poem. It's their feedback I aim to integrate.

4. Can there be such a thing as too much revision?

Absolutely, and I'm frequently guilty of it. But if we polish too much, we soften all the rough edges—and rough edges are often what makes poems distinctive, interesting, beautiful. Ever since I learned about it, I've loved the idea of wabi-sabi—I think we need to revise, but in a way that acknowledges the aesthetics of imperfection, the beauty of rough edges.

5. How do you tighten and reign in without losing the wild energies that sparked the poem in the first place?

I suspect that finding the balance between control and wild energy comes from being in a liminal state—having one foot in the ecstatic woods of Dionysus and one foot in the orderly Apollonian camp. You've got to straddle two worlds to pull it off. Not easy for us mortals.